DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 155 200 TM 007 104

TITLE	A Citizen's Introduction to Minimum Competency Programs for Students.
INSTITUTION	American Friends Service Committee, Jackson, Miss. Southeastern Public Education Program.
PUB DATE	Feb 78
NOTE	74p.; Some parts of the document may be marginally legible
AVAILABLE FROM	American Friends Service Committee, Southeastern Public Education Program, 401 Columbia Building, Columbia, South Carolina 29201 ($1.50)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$3.50 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Standards; Annotated Bibliographies; *Basic Skills; Educational Legislation; Educational Programs; Elementary Secondary Education; Graduation Requirements; Guides; *Mastery Tests; *Performance Based Education; Performance Criteria; Remedial Programs; State Programs; State Standards; *Student Certification; Student Evaluation; Testing Problems; *Testing Programs; Test Interpretation
IDENTIFIERS	*Minimal Competency Testing

ABSTRACT

The first part of this report is a question-and-answer survey of minimum competency legislation, testing programs, and remedial programs. It includes the questions of both the educator and the lay person. Topics include: minimum competency tests, the debate over minimum competency programs, what happens after testing, and what citizens should look for in minimum competency programs. The second part presents selected readings covering a wide spectrum of political and professional opinions. The third part is an annotated list of references and resources. The information and points of view again represent a variety of perspectives and degrees of objectivity. The six-page appendix describes minimal competency testing activities in twenty-five states: action taken, how standards are set, grade levels assessed, skill areas assessed, and uses of standards and test results. (CTM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED155200

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. Hayes Mizzell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

A CITIZENS' INTRODUCTION TO MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Southeastern Public Education Program
American Friends Service Committee
401 Columbia Building
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

February 1978

TM007 104

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	WHAT ARE MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAMS?	1
II.	THE DEBATE OVER MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAMS	5
III.	MINIMUM COMPETENCY TESTS: WHAT THEY ARE, HOW THEY WORK	10
IV.	WHAT HAPPENS AFTER TESTING?	15
V.	OTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAMS	18
VI.	WHAT CITIZENS SHOULD LOOK FOR: DEVELOPING OR EVALUATING MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAMS	22
VII.	READINGS	35
VIII.	RESOURCES	52
IX.	APPENDIX	57

INTRODUCTION

Education policy makers are debating, developing, and mandating minimum competency programs for students. Most of this activity is the result of citizens' expressions of dissatisfaction with the level of students' mastery and application of basic academic skills. One national poll revealed that 83% of the persons interviewed favored an emphasis on basic skills in schools. At least 26 states have instituted some kind of minimum competency program.

We believe school age children have a right to receive appropriate instruction which will enable them to master the basic skills they need to fulfill their personal and career goals. It remains to be seen whether, and at what price, minimum competency programs will facilitate that process of skill development. We know that students' development of competencies is dependent upon the quality of education they receive. It has been our experience that quality education occurs where administrators and teachers believe deeply in the potential of all students; where educators develop and implement, with energy and imagination, effective programs to identify and build on that potential; and where they initiate, with unusual sincerity and vigor, efforts to communicate to parents and children that they are valuable and respected participants in the educational process. Minimum competency programs may augment these efforts where they exist, but in their absence it is questionable whether even the most well designed competency program, or the most severe penalties, will result in significantly improved education.

If minimum competency programs are to be more than a simplistic political response to a complex set of social and educational problems, citizens must understand and let their views be known concerning the design and implementation of minimum competency programs. We hope this publication will provide citizens with basic information to help them better understand and respond to issues raised by minimum competency programs.

The first five sections of this publication, pages 1 through 21, use a question and answer format to provide readers with facts and points of view which are likely to be part of any discussion about minimum competency programs. The sixth section--"What Citizens Should Look For"--lists critical concerns we believe should be taken

into account when assessing the design and effect of minimum competency programs. Section VII is a selection of readings--excerpts from articles, speeches, letters, testimony--which offer opinions of experienced researchers, educators, and political leaders. In Section VIII an annotated list of resources suggests more detailed information on the many dimensions of minimum competency programs. Section IX, the Appendix, consists of a chart originally prepared by the Education Commission of the States. This chart outlines the key facts of minimum competency programs initiated in various states.

It is our hope that this publication will help citizens reach informed opinions about minimum competency programs, and will encourage them to play a more active role in determining the fate and shape of minimum competency programs in their communities.

M. Hayes Mizell
Associate Director
Southeastern Public Education
American Friends Service Committee

WHAT ARE MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAMS?

1. *What are "minimum competency programs"?*

"Minimum competency programs" are organized efforts to make sure public school students are able to demonstrate their mastery of certain minimum skills needed to perform tasks they will routinely confront in adult life.

2. *What are the components of minimum competency programs?*

There are many different types of such programs. Though they differ from state to state or from one school district to another, here are some of the features often found in these programs:

-- Statements of the specific skills--such as those needed for reading, writing, and performing mathematical computations--that students are required to master. These are called "performance standards" or "learning objectives." They help pinpoint the competencies schools are responsible for teaching all children.

-- Tests to determine if students have mastered the required skills; or tests to diagnose the specific skills in which the students may be weak. The term "minimum competency testing" is often used.

-- Requirements that students cannot advance to the next grade, cannot graduate from school, or cannot receive a regular diploma if they cannot demonstrate their mastery of the required minimum skills.

-- Requirements that students must take a special remedial course if they cannot demonstrate their mastery of the skills.

3. *Why am I reading and hearing so much about the need for minimum competency programs in public schools?*

Pressures to find ways to assure that high school graduates have mastered certain basic, minimum skills come from several quarters:

Many parents are disturbed when they find their children cannot read, write, or compute at a level the parents think is necessary.

Many educators are concerned because high school students' scores on standardized tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test are declining.

Many college instructors are upset when they find some students can't write a coherent paragraph.

Many employers are angry when young job applicants can't fill out an application, follow simple written directions, or can't read well enough to perform even simple job tasks.

These collective experiences have created a concern that too many students graduating from public schools do not have or cannot apply the basic skills needed to function effectively in our society.

4. *What is meant by "some high school students do not have or cannot apply the skills needed to function in society?"*

There are certain tasks that are fundamental to functioning as an adult member of society. These can include:

-- being responsible for routine personal, home-making and business affairs;
-- communicating with others;
-- pursuing secondary education (formal or self-directed);
-- getting and holding a job;
-- fulfilling the duties of responsible citizenship.

In order to perform these tasks, specific skills are necessary. An adult must be able to read well

enough to scan the "want-ads" in a newspaper and follow instructions to get and hold a job. He/she must be able to write well enough to fill out a job application, or write a letter. And he/she must be able to do mathematics well enough to pay bills, to know how much money has been spent or is on hand, and to perform simple household calculations. Reading, writing and calculating well enough to perform these basic tasks is what is meant by having minimum competencies. Using these skills in daily adult life is what is meant by applying the skills in order to function in society.

5. *Who decides what skills and tasks are minimially necessary?*

In states and local school districts which have adopted minimum competency programs these decisions have been made by either a state legislature, a state board of education, a division of a state department of education, or by a local school board.

Because each of these groups is a public body accountable in some way to citizens, there is an opportunity for citizens to have a voice in determining the content of minimum competency programs.

6. *If there are students who have not mastered or who cannot apply basic skills, what can be done?*

There are many options, not all of which are desirable. Schools have responded and are responding to this problem in a variety of ways. They might:

-- encourage or allow students who have not mastered or who cannot apply basic skills to drop out of school;
-- not allow students to graduate until they can demonstrate their mastery and use of basic skills;
-- not allow students to receive a regular high school diploma;
-- not allow students to be promoted from one grade level to the next;
-- do nothing; allow students to be promoted or graduated without having mastered basic skills or without having demonstrated they can apply them;
-- assign such students to a less demanding curriculum or "track".

Each of the above responses penalizes the students involved, but does not assure the students will ultimately master basic skills as a result of the penalty.

Other schools might choose to:

- -- identify students' weaknesses in specific basic skill areas early in the students' school career, and continuously throughout, and provide them with special assistance to develop the required skills;
- -- provide students with individualized instruction utilizing one or more of the following: teachers' aides, programmed instruction, peer instruction, significantly smaller classes, special materials, skill labs, etc.;
- -- require such students to attend summer school;
- -- establish tutoring programs to provide such students with special help after school;
- -- work with parents to teach them how to help their children learn basic skills at home;
- -- assign such students to special classes which devote more time amd effort to emphasizing the mastery and use of basic skills in working with the regular course content.

The above efforts may or may not cause students to be able to master and apply basic skills, but at least the focus is on providing help to the student.

Minimum competency programs sometimes involve one or more of the responses listed in both of the above groups.

7. *What do people hope minimum competency programs will achieve?*

There are a variety of attitudes and motives held by those supporting minimum competency programs. These include:

-- *Minimum competency programs will help those children who have the greatest educational needs.*

It is argued that the educational needs of many underachieving students have often been ignored or inappropriately met by school systems. Minimum competency programs are seen as a way to require school systems to identify who these students are and to focus more attention, energy and resources on properly responding to their basic educational needs. Many parents of minority and disadvantaged students hold this view because they feel the schools have not given their children enough attention and have allowed them to "slide by" without mastering essential basic skills.

-- *Minimum competency programs will motivate students and stop "social promotions."*

Some people believe too many students put forth too little effort in school because they know they will be promoted or graduated regardless of how well they perform. When this happens it is called "social promotion." As a result, some students do not acquire the basic skills they need. It is hoped that if all students are required to demonstrate their mastery of certain minimum competencies before they can be promoted or graduated this will put an end to "social promotion." It is also hoped these requirements will motivate students to work harder to learn the skills necessary to pass competency tests.

-- *Minimum competency programs will define more precisely what skills must be taught and learned.*

Holding school systems accountable has been difficult because it often has not been clear specifically what teachers are expected to teach or what students are expected to learn. Minimum competency programs can establish certain learning objectives at the state level or require local school districts to develop them for specific subject areas. Students will then know what they must learn. Parents will have benchmarks against which to measure their children's progress. And teachers can focus more attention on teaching those specific skills.

-- *Minimum competency programs will certify that students have specific minimum competencies.*

Employers used to rely on high school diplomas to certify that students could read, write and compute at acceptable levels of competence. Now, however, many employers have complained thay even high school graduates do not always have basic competencies necessary in business and industry. Minimum competency programs tied to graduation requirements may restore confidence that a diploma means competency in certain areas. Where not tied to graduation requirements, minimum competency programs may at least aid employers who want to identify those students who do and do not have certain minimum skills.

8. *What are the arguments against minimum competency programs?*

There are many concerns about minimum competency programs. Among those heard most frequently are:

-- *Minimum competency programs will exclude more children from schools and further stigmatize and harm underachieving youth.*

Minimum competency programs can be punitive and exclusionary if they are used simply to deny students promotion or graduation. There is a concern that students who perform poorly

on the competency tests will not receive the kind of help they need and they will be branded as failures and drop out of school. This is especially worrisome for students who do not perform well on paper and pencil tests, which is the format of most minimum competency tests. Another concern is that minimum competency programs will be used to certify a student's lack of prescribed competencies, which may result in many academically marginal youth becoming unemployable. Children who have historically been shortchanged by the schools--minorities, the low-income, and the disadvantaged--are particularly vulnerable to these abuses.

-- *Minimum competency programs will not assure that children will receive effective remediation.*

Identifying students' academic problems is only the first step in providing them the help they need. Money, training, and personnel are then necessary to provide students with special help to strengthen their skills. There is no guarantee adequate resources will be provided for such efforts through minimum competency programs. Even if such resources are available, educators have had great difficulty in establishing effective remedial programs. Few effective remedial programs have been developed and maintained by most school systems.

-- *Minimum competency programs oversimplify the competency issue.*

Questions have been raised about the wisdom of placing so much emphasis on the "basics" when there are so many other factors essential to a successful adjustment to adult life and work. The educational process is exceedingly complex, and it is naive to believe that "essential" competencies can be isolated and tested.

-- *Minimum competency programs will result in curricula becoming too narrow.*

Similarly, there is concern that so much emphasis on basic skills will narrow school curricula. This means less attention will be devoted to providing a broad range of

important educational experiences for young people. Youngsters who perform poorly in academic subjects, but who may excel in other subject areas in which they are more talented, may suffer the most.

-- *Minimum competency programs will place the burden for "failure" on students.*

Under the provisions of many minimum competency programs it is the students who must bear the heaviest burden for their unsatisfactory performance on a competency test. This is seen as another example of "blaming the victim" because even though it may be schools which have failed to meet the students' basic skill needs, it is students who are denied promotion or graduation, or who are unfairly labeled. Legislators, school board members, administrators, or teachers are not subject to comparable penalties for their failure to create necessary programs, provide quality instruction, or appropriate the money that will help students learn the basic skills. Thus, if students do not master the competencies expected of them they are the ones who receive the blame and punishment, while others who may be at least partially responsible for poor student performance are not held accountable.

-- *Minimum competency programs will cause educators to be held unfairly accountable.*

Another perspective is that of school officials and classroom teachers who believe they may be evaluated and held accountable on the basis of how their students perform on a minimum competency test. A test score alone, however, would not take into account other factors affecting students' competencies. Such factors may include the curriculum, school resources, the students' family background and home environment, etc. Classroom teachers point out that they have no control over these factors.

-- *Minimum competency programs will encourage teachers to "teach the test."*

Teachers may be under so much pressure to have their students score well on minimum competency tests, they may spend most of their time teaching the students the very

limited and specific skills needed to do well on the tests. The effect of this may be that students can successfully complete competency tests but still may not be able to apply those skills to other situations, or learn the range of skills they need.

-- *Minimum competency programs will cause the "minimum" to become the "maximum."*

The use of minimum competency programs may result in a curriculum which will no longer challenge students who are capable of exceeding the "minimum." There are concerns that schools are already doing too little to challenge such students. The initiation of minimum competency programs may now signal average and above average students that the schools have lowered their expectations of them. As a result, these students may no longer work as hard because they will know they can "get by" so long as they demonstrate their mastery of the minimum competencies required. This may cause the additional problem that students who can meet these minimum requirements may want to graduate from school early because, they may argue, they have met the basic requirements set by the schools. Thus, the question of how high or low to set the "minimum" is an important issue.

9. *What do minimum competency tests try to measure?*

Minimum competency tests can measure "school skills" and/or how school skills are applied to real life situations ("life tasks"):

"School skills" In these tests students are asked to respond to test items which call for a straightforward use of skills learned in school. They probably do not test the student's ability to apply the skills learned in school to a life situation. Thus, a test for "school skills" may determine that a student knows how to add and subtract but that does not necessarily mean the student can balance a checkbook. These test items may not be too different from those found on typical school achievement tests except that they are designed only to test the student's minimum competencies.

or

"Life tasks" (or "life skills") In these tests the students are asked to respond to questions which simulate situations they may encounter in adult life. For example, they may be asked to complete a part of an application for a job or to check the addition on a grocery bill.

10. *Do minimum competency tests measure anything other than students' competencies in reading, writing, and math?*

It depends on what your state legislature, your state board of education, or your local school board determines are the important competencies students should have. Citizens' opinions of what are the essential competencies may differ from those of the representative bodies listed above.

Most people agree it is important for students to be competent in:

Reading
Writing
Mathematics / Computation

However, in some places people believe it is also important for students to be able to demonstrate their competencies in:

Health
Citizenship
Personal and Family Finances
Civic and Social Responsibility
Listening
Oral Expression
Family Life
Analyzing
Environmental Protection
Energy Conservation
Human Relations

(See Appendix, under the column headed "Skill Areas Assessed", to find out which competencies are included in the mandated competency programs of various states.)

11. *When would students be tested in a minimum competency program?*

It differs from place to place, and this is another area where citizen input is valuable in shaping the program.

Currently, in some school districts, the students must take and pass a test in the twelfth grade in order to qualify for graduation or a regular diploma. Testing so late in a student's school career gives additional information to students, parents, and employers about students' actual performance levels. However, it doesn't allow for any remedial work to help the student make up his/her learning gaps, or help the school change its curriculum or the teaching styles of its teachers.

Minimum competency programs are more likely to be helpful to students in those districts where tests are administered periodically during a student's school career. In some states students are tested in grades 1, 3, 6, 9, and 11. Other states test less frequently, such as in grades 4 and 8.

(See Appendix, under the column headed "Grade Levels Assessed", to find out at what grade levels tests are administered as part of the mandated competency programs of various states.)

12. *Can you give examples of what might be included on a minimum competency test?*

Yes. Some tests ask for a direct application of "school skills." The following are sample questions from the "Proficiency and Review" test in Denver, Colorado:

1. Add the following sets of numbers:

   978
   669
   435
   + 587

   The correct answer is:

   (A) 2568, (B) 2569, (C) 2659,

   (D) 2669, (E) NONE

2. If you think a word is misspelled, circle the letter before it. If you think all the words are spelled correctly, circle the letter before NONE:

   A-touch, B-message, C-choclate,

   D-yourself, E-NONE

3. This question measures ability to recognize correct English. There are three types of errors: punctuation, capitalization, and grammar. Each line in the following passage is numbered and represents one test question. Mark each line according to the following key: P for an error in punctuation, C for an error in capitalization, G for an error in grammar and N for no error.

   A. Have you ever went to a flea

   B. market. Sandmore High School will have the

   C. second International Flea Market on Saturday.

13. *Are all competency tests like that?*

No. Other tests ask students to apply school skills to real life tasks, such as these sample questions from a test developed by the Educational Testing Service:

1. A job pays $6.50 per hour with time-and-a-half for overtime. If you work 40 regular hours and 8 overtime hours at that job, how much would you earn?

   (A) $360 (B) $312 (C) $338 (D) $468

2. An advertisement: Pine Grove Camp Needs
Counselors
Please apply in writing to:
Morgan Davis
10 Lincoln Road
Louisville, Kentucky 40202

Directions: Thomas Moore is 17. He lives at 69 Banberry Lane in Louisville, Kentucky 40202. He has worked as a counselor at Camp Pioneer for two years. He has been trained in first-aid and water safety.

Pretend that you are Thomas Moore and write a letter applying for the job of counselor at Pine Grove Camp.

3. A warning on a medicine label may read:

Severe sore throat or sore throat accompanied by fever, headache, nausea, or vomiting may be serious. Consult a physician immediately. If rash or irritation develops stop using and consult a physician. Do not use more than 5 days or give to children under 3 years of age unless directed by a physician.

According to the label, if you have a sore throat, fever, and a headache, you should

(A) use the medicine for 5 days
(B) call a doctor as soon as you can
(C) increase the amount of medicine you take
(D) use other medication to cure the fever and headache

14. Won't most students pass such a test anyway?

It is assumed that for the average student who has learned how to read, write, and compute adequately in elementary school, competency tests will present no major problem. However, for marginal students, for underachievers, and for those with certain handicaps the competency tests may become a major hurdle.

15. *Aren't most schools giving minimal competency tests now?*

Not exactly. At present most tests given in schools are either developed (1) by individual classroom teachers, or (2) by national test publishers.

The tests developed by individual classroom teachers usually test only those skills or facts which the teacher thinks the students should be able to demonstrate based on what the teacher has taught in his/her classroom. These are called "criterion-referenced" tests. One problem for using them as minimal competency tests is that they vary widely from one classroom to another. One sixth grade teacher of math may expect more of his/her students, and design a test accordingly, than another math teacher in the same school teaching students of the same grade level. Not only do the "minimums" which are tested vary from one teacher to another, but the quality of the tests differ as well.

Tests developed by national publishers (such as the popular achievement tests like the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills or the Iowa Test of Basic Skills) are designed to test many different levels of students' performance, not just minimal. But more importantly, they are what are known as "norm-referenced" tests, and only tell how well a student performed compared to other students. They give no useful information on whether a student can perform a particular skill. If the students on whom the test was "normed" all had low skill levels in reading, for example, it would be possible for a student to have a relatively high score and still not read well enough to function in adult life.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER TESTING?

16. *If a student passes the minimum competency test required for graduation from high school, does this mean the student is able to perform at the twelfth grade level?*

No. Most minimum competency requirements for graduation are designed only to assure that the student can successfully complete the specific items included on the test. These represent the *minimum* level of performance acceptable, not what high school graduates should have learned in other areas or even what the average twelfth grader knows. Most of the people who construct these tests believe that the items represent skills necessary for adult literacy. (This usually corresponds to what students are expected to know when they are in the seventh or eighth grade.)

Note that because the tests measure *minimum* levels of skills, they don't tell you how well some students can do, nor the range of skills from "minimally acceptable" to "best". Students who have passed them and have received a regular high school diploma will perform at many different levels. One student may be able to perform at a level expected of an eighth grader while another may be able to function at a level expected of a junior in college.

17. *What happens if a student doesn't "pass" the competency test?*

Again, this depends on the provisions of a particular state or school district. Citizen input is critical in determining this aspect of minimum competency programs.

In some places, if the student does not perform satisfactorily on the competency test, he/she simply doesn't receive a regular diploma. (He/she may receive a special certificate of attendance.)

In other places, the student may receive remedial help, or may have to take a special course. Many minimum competency programs allow the student to take the test again after receiving remedial help.

Some state minimum competency laws address this problem. Colorado law requires schools to provide extra tutorial assistance to students. California law requires students to be provided with remedial assistance and for parent-teacher-principal-student conferences to be held to discuss the problem.

(See Appendix, under the column headed, "Use of Standards and Test", to find out how the tests results are used in the various states with mandated competency programs.)

18. *How effective are remedial programs?*

The problem with such programs is that many school districts lack well developed remedial programs in the basic skills--especially at the secondary school level.

It is one thing to require that students who fail the competency test receive remedial help, but it is quite another matter to develop an *effective* remedial program. The problem is underscored when one considers that many of the students who are most likely to fail a minimum competency test are those who have been receiving some form of remedial help anyway. The challenge clearly will be how to use the information the tests will provide in a constructive manner, and how to improve and support the special programs some students will need.

19. *What kind of remedial programs have proven to be effective?*

Again, this requires an extensive answer which we cannot provide here. However, you may wish to obtain the following publication which will help you identify specific programs that have apparently been effective in meeting the basic skill needs of children:

Education Programs That Work
1976, 289 pages, paperback
Cost: $4.95

Order from: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development
1855 Folsom Street
San Francisco, California 94103
(payment must accompany order)

This book provides concise descriptions of exemplary programs originally developed with funds provided by the Federal government. Some of the programs reviewed began under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which provides Federal funds to local school districts to establish special programs for educationally disadvantaged children. Most such programs are designed to strengthen the students' basic skills.

20. *If minimum competency programs require that local school districts provide special programs for those who do not pass the tests, who will pay for such programs?*

This is unclear. The state legislature would have to provide funds for such programs or local school districts would have to find or raise money to finance them. In the past, local school districts have complained when state legislatures passed laws requiring the districts to initiate new educational programs but provided no new state monies to help pay for those programs. The lack of money could become an excuse for inaction on the part of the districts. Of course, the intended benefits of any minimum competency program would be seriously undermined if there were a requirement that students not passing the test should receive remedial help only to find districts were giving "lip service" to this requirement in the absence of any state funds to finance such programs.

However, there are those who feel that few additional resources are necessary and that schools could accomplish a great deal by simply redirecting monies that are now used in ineffective attempts to teach students. Such instructional strategies as "peer teaching" (more skilled students helping teach less skilled students on an individual basis) might be used in the absence of more money.

OTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAMS

21. *Can you explain more about how minimum competency programs are related to concerns about "social promotion"?*

Many citizens perceive "social promotion" as a cause of public school graduates not having skills the public thinks are essential. "Social promotion" refers to the practice of allowing students to advance to the next grade even if they have not mastered the academic skills taught in the lower grade. The promotion, in other words, tends to be based more on the student's age than on what he/she has demonstrated he/she has learned.

In the past this practice has been defended on the basis that it was not realistic to retain students in the same grade year after year. Such retentions often resulted in over-age students being in the same classroom with much younger children. It has been the opinion of many educators that such retained students do not have the opportunity for healthy social and emotional development, and that they suffer from the stigma of having to remain back a grade while their classmates go on to the next grade. The effect of such a stigma has been that often these students are branded as failures, develop a poor self-concept, and drop out of school.

During the 1975-76 school year in one Southern state, half of the students who dropped out of school had also repeated one or more grades. Thus, many educators contend that "retaining" a student does not solve the student's motivational or learning problems.

22. *Well, is "social promotion" good or bad?*

Think of it in terms of what the child really needs.

"Social promotion" is not good if it becomes a cop-out for the school with the result that the child's real academic and emotional needs are ignored. Obviously, it does the child no good if he/she is passed along through the school system without ever having his/her real needs diagnosed and met, and that has too often been the case.

(...e other hand, there is certainly no guarantee that the child's needs *will* be met just because he/she is "retained" at a particular grade level. If the school and its personnal have no commitment, plan, or resources for dealing with the child the second year he/she is in a grade that significantly differs from the way he/she was dealt with the first year he/she was in that same grade, then holding the child back will not likely help.

Meeting children's needs is not so simple as either promoting them or failing them. "Retaining" a student is usually meant to frighten, punish, or motivate the child but it does not necessarily require the school or its personnel to do anything different to assure that the child will get the help he/she needs. Thus, the real emphasis should be on creating and supporting a system which requires schools more intensively to diagnose and address the needs of children who do not meet the minimum competency requirements.

If children are really to be helped and to be able to perform minimum competencies then the schools must have the commitment and capacity to give special attention to those children, regardless of whether they are promoted or "retained." Many children are not now receiving such attention. Of course, providing special attention requires strong and dedicated school administrators, good teachers, and money. A minimum competency program may help to better focus the resources which are presently available, but it is no substitute for more committed and skilled educators or for the money which is needed to train and employ such professionals.

23. *Are there other reasons people are now so interested in minimum competency programs?*

Yes. Some believe the value of a high school diploma has been "cheapened" because even students with a diploma cannot necessarily read, write or compute well enough to succeed in a job. It is the opinion of many such people that only students who have clearly demonstrated their mastery of basic skills should receive a high school diploma. Other students who have attended public school for 12 years but have not mastered the basic skills should receive some kind of certificate of attendance, it is argued.

24. *Are the concerns about the value of a high school diploma valid?*

It depends on what is considered to be the purpose of a high school diploma. Some people, especially employers of high school graduates, want the diploma to be a convenient screening device, or a guarantee which assures them the job applicant has certain basic skills. In other words, they want the diploma to be a certificate which, in effect, says the job applicant can perform certain basic skills. But in reality a diploma is a piece of paper which reveals very little about an individual's competency.

Some educators contend that it is wrong to think of the diploma as a document which certifies that the bearer has certain competencies. They say the diploma is really nothing more than an award for the student completing the course requirements the state has mandated. If you want to know whether a person is competent, these educators say, and what competencies the individual has, then it is necessary to examine the transcript of that person, as well as look at his/her record of performance in extracurricular activities and talk with some of the educators who have taught and worked with that person.

Most of us would like to think there is a simple way of sorting out the potentially good workers from the bad ones, and the most competent from the least competent, but it is probably too much to expect that a high school diploma alone can provide the convenient means for making such determinations.

As members of the general public, we all know doctors, lawyers, teachers, barbers, and scholars who have diplomas hanging on their walls, but we have all had experiences which would cause us to doubt that these diplomas mean all such individuals are competent.

25. *What effect will minimum competency programs have on a school's curriculum?*

It seems logical that if students are to be tested to determine their mastery of certain skills, then the curricula of individual schools will have to reflect the new emphasis

on those skills. Adjustments in what is taught, how it is taught, and the amount of time teaching it may be necessary. This will particularly be the case in those schools where significant numbers of students do not meet the minimum competency requirements. However, if a school implements the competency program in a way that places the burden of failure and the need for remediation only on the shoulders of those students who perform poorly, then few changes in the curriculum may occur.

WHAT CITIZENS SHOULD LOOK FOR: DEVELOPING OR EVALUATING MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAMS

1. *A minimum competency test must have curricular or instructional validity.* This means the test must be designed so it only measures what the school is actually teaching the students. Otherwise the students will be penalized for the school's failure to teach specific competencies. There is always the danger a competency test might be designed to test what policy makers (legislators, state or local school board members) think students *should* know, while in fact the instructional program does not emphasize the skills which are tested. Inherent in any minimum competency program should be a guarantee by the State, the school district, and school that the students will be taught those skills necessary to pass the competency test.

2. *A minimum competency testing program should not penalize those students who have been in school for a number of years prior to the imposition of the minimum competency program.* In other words, if a minimum competency test is administered for the first time when a student is in the tenth grade, it must be understood that the student is taking the test without the benefit of adequate preparation resulting from the school system's new emphasis on the skills to be tested. Thus, to be fair to the students who are currently in the upper grade levels the competency program should probably be phased in beginning at the elementary level.

3. *The minimum competency program must use multi-cultural tests.* This means that the tests must assess those "competencies" which the various racial, ethnic, amd language groups agree are important for children to attain. It is likely that the best way to reach such a consensus is through a careful and deliberate process of community education and discussion about the minimum competency program and what it should include. *Before* a competency test is purchased from a publisher or is developed at the state or local level it should be carefully reviewed by legitimate and knowledgeable representatives of various racial, ethnic, and language groups to assure that the test measures only those skills which the groups agree are necessary for success in adult life.

4. *The minimum competency program must not penalize those students who were formerly enrolled in schools offering inferior educational programs.* Many state and federal courts have issued decisions declaring that students received unequal educational opportunities when they had to attend racially segregated schools, or poor schools which were denied adequate financial resources because of a state's school finance system. In many places there are students currently enrolled in schools who began their educational careers in such segregated or economically deprived schools. Many of these students still have not received the assistance they need to overcome the basic skill weaknesses resulting from attending unlawfully segregated or underfinanced schools. Therefore, any minimum competency program now imposed should take account of this fact. Special provisions, such as a "grandfather clause," should be made so they do not suffer penalities for a condition for which the State is responsible.

5. *Any laws or policies which are enacted for the purpose of establishing a minimum competency program should include provisions which will allow exemption procedures to be established for handicapped and non-English speaking students.* Minimum competency programs which require students to repeat a grade, to be enrolled in a special program, or not to receive a regular high school diploma if they do not meet the minimum requirements should not apply to students who by virtue of their handicap or language barrier cannot perform on an equal basis with other students. The tests may have to be administered in a different way, other kinds of competencies may have to be tested, diplomas indicating the specific competencies achieved may have to be developed, or tests assessing different levels of competencies may have to be developed, but the special situation of handicapped and language minority students must be taken into account.

6. *A minimum competency program must set forth a specific process for consultation with and involvement of parents.* This process should include a sophisticated reporting system which communicates to parents what specific competencies the school is teaching and what competencies the child has mastered. It should also provide for a systematic process of parent-administrator-teacher-student conferences. Such communication between parents and schools should be mandated to take place *before* mandated minimum competency tests are administered. The conference

should be designed so that both the parents and the school personnel commit themselves to specific actions which will aid the student in correcting weaknesses identified during regular classroom experiences.

7. *Minimum competency programs should not be used to deny promotion or graduation based solely on a student's performance on a single test.* If a student's competencies are to be used as a major criterion for promotion or graduation then the student's competencies in a broad range of areas must be examined. These might include competencies demonstrated in extracurricular activities, vocational classes, working in a part-time job in the community or in summer employment, etc.

8. *Teachers must be trained to properly administer and interpret minimum competency tests.* In the past, the abuse of tests has often occurred because teachers were not adequately prepared to administer them or to interpret their results. Any minimum competency program must mandate that all school personnel directly involved in administering and interpreting minimum competency tests receive in-service training before minimum competency tests are used. Such mandates must also clearly indicate which agency or officials are responsible for providing the training, and for periodically assessing the quality of the training. Some process for determining how effectively the school personnel are using the test must also be established.

SEVEN KEY NOTES ON MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING

There follows a paper by this title prepared and delivered by Dr. Henry M. Bricknell at a series of regional workshops on minimal competency testing sponsored in the fall of 1977 by the Education Commission of the States and the National Institute of Education. Dr. Bricknell is director of Policy Studies in Education, a division of the Academy for Educational Development. We are including Dr. Bricknell's paper in this section because we believe it is an essential document for citizens who want to participate in the process of developing or evaluating minimum competency programs. Citizens should give careful attention to the major policy options and dilemmas which Dr. Bricknell so clearly sets forth in his paper.

Seven Key Notes on Minimum Competency Testing

I want to strike not one but seven key notes since the policy you compose for minimum competency testing must have seven themes or it will be an unfinished symphony. That is, there are seven things to think about, seven elements in your competency policy:

1. What competencies will you require?
2. How will you measure them?
3. When will you measure them?
4. How many minimums will you set?
5. How high will you set the minimum?
6. Will they be for schools or for students?
7. What will you do about the incompetent?

1. WHAT COMPETENCIES?

That is the first question.

Begin by distinguishing between school skills and life skills, between the skills it takes to get by in school and the skills it takes to get by in life, between those needed to succeed later in school and those needed to succeed later in life.

There is a difference. And there are different tests for them. Here is a question from a *school skills* test:

- If John has 70 marbles and gives José 13 marbles and gets 26 marbles from Slim and gives 38 marbles to Alice, how many marbles does John have left?

And here is an item from a *life skills* test:

- Balance this checkbook by adding these deposit slips and substracting those cancelled checks.

Both require arithmetic but the first one--although it sounds easier--requires the student to abstract the ideas, decide to add and substract, and arrange the numbers before making the computation while the second one does not. The first are classic skills of the school room, excellent predictors of success in higher levels of mathematics. In fact, it is more important to set the problem up correctly than to get the right number of marbles--if we are talking about *school skills*.

But if we are talking about *life skills*, getting the bank balance right is everything.

Here is another *school skills* question:

- If there are 77 teeth in 2 and 3/4 inches of hacksaw blade, how many teeth are there in 3 and 1/3 inches?

Here is another *life skills* question:

- To saw very hard metal, whould you buy a hacksaw blade with few teeth or many teeth?

The first will indicate whether the student is ready for the next course in school; the second will indicate whether the student is ready for the shopping center. Both are important. Which competencies should you require?

How about school skills for the college bound and life skills for the job bound? Or maybe both for everybody? How about school skills for promotion to the next grade and life skills for graduation from school? Or maybe both at every point in school so that every student must climb a stepladder of learning with its rungs held up on two sides: school skills on one side, life skills on the other side?

Of course, there are basic skills--such as reading, writing, and arithmetic--used in both school and life, which is why we call them "basic."

	SCHOOL SUBJECTS				LIFE AREAS				
BASIC SKILLS	Art	Business	English	Etc.	Citizenship	Work	Family	Etc.	Total
READING									
WRITING									
ARITHMETIC									
ETC.									
TOTAL									

Thus you have five choices. You could test competency in each:

1. Basic skills.
2. School subject.
3. Life area.
4. Basic skill *applied* in each school subject.
5. Basic skill *applied* in each life area.

The obvious choice is #1: Basic skills. But wait a minute. Look at the others.

- Unless you choose #2, teachers of art and music and science and social studies and foreign language and driver education and vocational subjects will have no minimum standards.

- Unless you choose #3, teachers can teach about school but not about life.

- Unless you choose #4, students may spell a list of words correctly in English class but misspell them in their science laboratory notebooks.

- Unless you choose #5, students may learn to add and subtract but be unable to balance their checkbooks.

But you can't select them all because schools do not have time and money for that much testing. So choose very thoughtfully. You will have to live with the consequences.

2. HOW MEASURED?

How will you measure the competencies:

The possibilities range from testing through actual experience to testing with paper and pencil. There are some points in between:

1	2	3	4
Actual Performance Situations	Simulated Performance Situations	School Products and Performances	Paper And Pencil

So you have four choices. You could test through:

1. *Actual performance* situations in later school or on the job. This is the ideal "testing." The student demonstrates minimum competency by entering and graduating from the next level of schooling or getting a job and keeping it. The trouble is that such testing" is expensive; it takes years; and the results come back too late to help either the school or the student.

2. *Simulated performance* situations set up in the schoolhouse to resemble those in later school or on the job. This is good testing. The student demonstrates minimum competency in artificial situations like the real ones to come. This is cheaper, takes less time, and gives quicker results to help school and student correct failures. But it isn't perfect: 1) the situations are not real and the results may not match actual performance later , 2) there are few good tests available, and 3) it takes more time and money than using paper and pencil.

3. *School products and performances.* These are essays, paintings, experiments, clarinet solos, brake jobs, speeches, touchdowns--things students make or do while studying in school. This is not as good as simulated performance testing because the student usually has had help, the test pressures are missing, and it is hard to score the results. But it takes less time and money than arranging special simulations.

4. *Paper and pencil tests* in the classroom--what we usually think of as "tests." Most of these measure a narrow band of knowledge or skill and are far removed from actual performance situations. Thus the results may not foreshadow later success in school and life, where success depends on attitudes, values, personal warmth, leadership, creativity, physical strength and other things a person cannot show with a piece of paper and a pencil. But those tests are quick and easy and cheap and available.

To summarize, as you move away from actual performance situations in life and move toward paper and pencil, testing becomes easier and cheaper but the test results become less likely to predict later success. Thus a student can fail on a minimum competency paper and pencil test but pass in the actual performance situations of real life. Remember this later when we talk about using test results to withhold diplomas.

Now you might want to do this: use simulated performance situations to test *life skills* and use paper and pencil to test *school skills.*

Here's why: taking a paper and pencil test is, in fact, an actual performance situation in school. Indeed, you could call it the most important school skill of all. In that sense, paper and pencil tests are not artificially removed from school, but only from life. Since a student who does well on a paper and pencil test today should also do well in school tomorrow, you may choose to test school skills accordingly.

Remember: different kinds of tests may give you quite different results. So decide carefully.

There is another decision you will have to make; will you develop your own tests or use what is available: as you move toward paper and pencil and as you decide to test school skills, you will find more and more tests to choose from. And vice versa. For instance, you will find many paper and pencil tests of solving science problems, an important school skill, but you will find few simulated performance tests of ethical behavior, an important life skill.

3. WHEN MEASURED?

Will you measure competencies during school or at the end of school?

Do it during school if you believe:

- You want to measure competency to move up from grade to grade in school.
- Students and their parents deserve a distant early warning if there is trouble ahead.
- Administrators need to make changes any time students do not progress: changes in curriculum, course selection, faculty in-service training. Only formal competency tests will alert administrators to unsatisfactory learning early enough to do something about it.

Do it at the end of school if you believe:

- You want to measure competency to move out of school and into next school or into life.
- Students learn at different rates. All students deserve enough time to reach the minimum.
- Teacher-made tests and daily classroom contact will identify students who are not making progress during school. Formal competency testing is not needed.

Now, you could measure:

- *School skills during school* to decide promotion from grade to grade.
- *Life skills at the end of school* to determine graduation.

Or you could measure *both at the end* if you feel that:

- Even the college-bound should be competent for life (many college students have already started working).
- Even the job-bound should be competent for further school (adults returning to school fill half the college classrooms today).

4. ONE MINIMUM OR MANY?

Will you set one minimum for all students or will you consider ability, special talents, family background, or other factors we know affect the *learning of students*? Will you set one

minimum for all schools or will you consider community characteristics, faculty composition, school spending, or other factors we know affect the *quality of schools?*

Think about student ability as one example. A single standard can be too hard for a dull student yet be too easy for a bright student: impossible for the dull and thus not motivating, trivial for the bright and thus not motivating, objectionable to parents and teachers of the dull, laughable to parents and teachers of the bright and thus acceptable to none of them.

Using a graduated standard on a sliding scale according to ability will solve all those problems. And it will instantly create others. A graduated standard expects less of some students. "Expect less, get less" is a formula most parents and teachers don't like. A graduated standard will grant a diploma to a dull but energetic student who gets 40 points on the exam and refuse a diploma to a bright but lazy student who gets 60 points on the exam. Moreover, current ability tests may not give fair and accurate measures and thus cannot guide expected achievement.

Is there a compromise with the best of both worlds? Yes, but it also has the worst of both worlds. You can use a low minimum for every student regardless of ability and a graduated minimum for students of, say, above-average ability. This does not expect the impossible from anyone but it does expect more from students who clearly can do more. The old problems--such as how to measure ability--are still there, of course.

The identical principals apply to setting single standards vs. graduated standards for schools as for students. A single standard may demand nothing of a wealthy suburban school and the impossible of a poor ghetto school. A graduated standard may label poor schools as places without hope or give them an excuse for not improving, neither of which is good for students, teachers, or administrators.

Perhaps you should set a separate standard for each student, considering his/her ability, special talents, and background--a standard negotiated among student, teacher, and parent. And perhaps the same for each school--a separate standard negotiated among board, administration, and faculty. Admittedly, the logistics would be formidable.

You may want to arrange several minimums into a graduated sequence to check student progress from grade to grade. Again, you may want to set a rough, general minimum immediately and refine it into specifics over the years ahead.

HOW HIGH THE MINIMUM?

If you take a cross-section of a school at any grade, you will find that some students are actually performing far above that grade and others far below. Some fifth graders do eighth grade work while others do second grade work. Some twelfth graders do college work while others do sixth grade work. The school is a staircase with one step labelled "seventh" but only half the 12-year-olds are standing on it.

Recently, a group of high school teachers made two minimum competency tests for the end of tenth grade: one in English, the other in mathematics. Any student who failed would get remediation, possibly two years of it, and possibly no diploma--good reason for the teachers to make the tests fairly easy and good reason for the students to try fairly hard.

I saw the tests and would say they were about fifth grade--long division, spell "separate", things like that--with a passing score of 60%. Not very hard. About 25% of the tenth graders flunked the English; about 50% flunked the math.

I talked with the teachers and principals afterward:

> "Suppose remediation doesn't work," I said. "Students haven't learned it in five years and may not in two more. Then what? How many diplomas can you withhold at commencement--as many as 20%?"
>
> "Of course not! Parents wouldn't stand for it. The Board, the administration, and the faculty would cave in under the pressure," they said.
>
> "Then how many diplomas can you refuse? How about 5%," I said.
>
> "Make that 3%," they said.
>
> "All right, 3%. Then 97% *have* to pass the minimum competency tests. What can you teachers and principals *guarantee*--not wish--that 97% of all graduates can do?" I said.
>
> "Guarantee? Really *guarantee* for 97%? Well, first grade work; maybe second grade--if you mean a guaranteed minimum," they said.
>
> "Won't that be embarrassing to the school?" I said. "Second grade work?"
>
> "Not as embarrassing at withholding 20% of the diplomas," they said.

You need to understand that, traditionally, minimums are something schools try for, not guarantee. They are goals, not standards. "Zero defects" is not a schoolhouse expression; "each student to his/her own potential" is. And just as that potential has no upper limit, it has no lower limit.

How many students can your school or state afford to remediate--or not promote or not graduate if remediation fails--afford both economically and politically? About 10%, more or less? Certainly it isn't 20%, the percent failing competency tests in many places today. Say it is 5%. Whatever it is, the percent failing the test will probably be higher. If you can't raise students to meet the minimum, will you lower the minimum to meet the students? Those are the only two ways to guarantee that 95% will succeed.

You need to think about that. Better choose a passing score, make a pilot run with your tests, see how many students fail, and decide whether to raise the students or lower the tests. A too-difficult test will embarrass you with too many failures and you will have to cut loopholes in it to let students escape--grandfather clauses, setting very low passing scores to start with and raising them year by year, and other loopholes. A too-easy test will embarrass you by being a joke to above average students, their parents, and the taxpayers.

Don't forget the twelve-year range in the achievement of "twelfth-graders." No public school in America has been able to eliminate it.

Oh, yes. There is something else about the minimum. How can you call it a "minimum" if the successful adults in town--butcher, baker, candlestick maker, doctor, lawyer, bureaucrat--cannot pass it? Should you define "successful" adulthood as being off welfare and out of prison, give the test to a cross-section of adults, and then make the passing score equal the lowest score made by any successful adult in town? In short, what do you mean by "minimally competent"? Can you find an adult example of it walking the streets and pick his/her test score as your standard? How could you justify making it any higher?

6. FOR SCHOOLS OR STUDENTS?

One state has a new set of reading tests for grades 4, 8, and 12. What should it set as the minimum score on each test? To get the answer, that state set up an independent panel of teachers, admministrators, and citizens. Then it told the panel what it meant by "minimum":

> The minimal acceptable outcome is defined as the percentage of fourth graders you believe *must* be able to correctly respond to the item for you to consider reading instruction to be meeting the *minimal* needs of our students.

> In making your decision on minimal acceptable performance, you will want to consider: 1) the importance of the skill being measured by the item; and 2) the intrinsic difficulty of the item itself. If the actual student performance on the item falls below the percentage figure you select, then you would consider present instruction in that skill area to be unacceptable.

And it gave the panel an example:

> In this example, the estimate for the minimal acceptable outcome is 40%. If the actual outcome were below 40%, you would feel very concerned about instruction of the reading skill measured by the particular item.

And if more than, for example, 70% got the answer right, you would feel rather satisfied, the state went on to explain to the panel.

But what about the other 30% who got it wrong? How could the panel possibly be satisfied with the performance of that 30%? The answer is that the panel was not looking at that 30% as individual students. It was only looking at overall school performance. And if 70% of the students got the right answer, that was good enough. In short, that state wanted a minimum for the school, not for each individual student.

But what will you do: will you judge students or will you judge schools? Must each person measure up or must each program measure up? Can the school program succeed even though some students fail?

Can you see how important the difference is? It determines whether you will write test items all students can pass or only most students can pass; whether you will test everybody or only a sample; whether you will report results to each individual parent or only to the general public; whether you will settle for a school program that reaches, say, 70% of the students even if that 70% misses, for example, every single disadvantaged child; and whether you will modify every unsatisfactory program or fail and recycle every unsatisfactory graduate?

You can see the difference in costs, types of tests, demands on the professional staff to teach every student, pressures on each student to succeed, and political action by parents of each student who fails.

7. WHAT ABOUT INCOMPETENTS?

What will you do about incompetent *students?*

1. Verify the findings independently before acting?
2. Give them several more chances?

3. Lower the standard so they can pass?
4. Remediate so they can pass?
5. Refuse to promote or graduate them until they can pass?
6. Promote or graduate them with a restricted diploma or certificate of attendance?

What will you do about incompetent *schools?*

1. Verify the findings independently?
2. Give them several more chances?
3. Lower the standard so they can operate?
4. Redesign their programs to match successful programs?
5. Refuse to let them operate unless they meet the standard?
6. Let them operate but refuse to accredit them?

You notice the parallels, of course. Whether you are requiring each student to be competent or each school to make a majority of its students competent, you can check the findings, give another chance to succeed, lower standards, modify the program, insist they meet standards before continuing, or let them go on but advertise their shortcomings to outsiders.

If *students*, each imcompetent one must be held back, or remediated, or labelled and sent on. If *schools*, current students can be moved on through uninterrupted but, to help future students, the school must be closed, or improved, or left open but have a skull and crossbones painted on the door.

NOTE: ECA has published a discussion guide written by Dr. Bricknell outlining alternatives for minimum competency testing. A checklist with pros and cons, the guide is designed for legislators, citizens committees, school board members, school administratirs, and school faculties.

Cost: Single copies, $5.00
Packets of 5, $20.00
Packets of 10, $30.00
Packets of 20, $50.00

Order from: Education Commission of the States
1860 Lincoln Street
Denver, Colorado

READINGS

WHAT STUDENTS CAN AND CANNOT DO

- Spotlight, December 1977
(a publication of NAEP)

The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) is a continuing national survey of the knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes of young Americans in major learning areas usually taught in schools. The findings below are based on the results of thousands of students taking NAEP-administered tests or "exercises."

NAEP project analysts used the results of students' performance on NAEP tests to develop a profile of what 9-, 13-, and 17-year olds can do, and cannot do.

Test or "assessment" items were identified as those answered correctly by more than two-thirds, by some (about 33%-67%) and by very few (less than one-third) of the students in each age group.

Using this breakdown, here's a look at what NAEP reported:

Many 9-year-olds: can add two-digit numbers; can read and comprehend literal facts in simple, brief stories; can write without making punctuation or word-choice errors; can name the President and generally explain how he is chosen.

Some 9-year-olds: can add a series of three- and four-digit numbers, subtract two-digit numbers and do single-digit multiplication word problems; know what fossils are and that disease can be spread by insects; understand that federal, state and local governments have different functions.

But few 9-year-olds: can subtract three- and four-digit numbers, do multiplication and division or understand fractions; know the head of a state is called a governor; understand detailed written instructions; can organize and elaborate ideas in writing.

Many 13-year-olds: can add, subtract, multiply and divide whole numbers; can make change; understand basic facts about the solar system and universe; know the functions of the major parts of the body; understand the basic functions of the court system; know how to use basic reference materials.

Some 13-year-olds: understand and can compute with fractions and work word problems; understand specific facts about the earth; can read and understand detailed instructions.

But few 13-year-olds: can organize and elaborate on ideas in writing; understand the structure and function of the legislative branch of government; understand basic principles of economics.

Many 17-year-olds: can add, substract, multiply and divide whole numbers and decimals, multiply fractions, calculate a simple average, solve simple word problems requiring multiplication and evaluate simple algebraic expressions; understand some facts about nutrition, illness and disease; understand some functions and limits of government; can read and understand short, straightforward materials such as newspaper ads and telephone bills; have mastered the mechanics of writing.

Some 17-year-olds: know about human reproduction; can convert decimals to common fractions and add fractions; can organize and elaborate on ideas in writing; can make inferences after reading a long paragraph.

But few 17-year-olds: can calculate the area of a square given its perimeter or simplify algebraic expressions; can convert Farenheit to centigrade given the conversion formula; can write excellent unified and focused essays; know the functions of the legislative branch of government; have discussed aptitude tests results with anyone who could advise them about career plans.

READING Early in 1977, NAEP reported that, nationwide, 17-year-old students have improved in the basic reading skills needed in everyday life.

Tempering that encouraging fact, however, were these statistics about the 17-year-olds: more than 21% of those from disadvantaged urban areas, nearly 42% of the blacks and 20% of those from the Southeast are functionally illiterate.

The findings were from a survey made by National Assessment for the Right to Read Program of the U.S. Office of Education. The study compared the functional reading performance of 17-year-old students in 1971, 1974 and 1975. From 1971 to 1975, black students, students living in the Southeast, West, and Central part of the country improved their performance by 2-5 percentage points.

Right to Read defines functional literacy as "being able to perform tasks necessary to function in American society, such as reading newspapers, instructions and even drivers' license tests." The program determined that, to be considered functionally literate, a 17-year-old should be able to answer correctly at least 75% of the questions included in the assessment.

Using the Right to Read criterion as a guide, NAEP found that, nationwide, about 87% of the 17-year-olds are functionally literate. In regional results, the percentage of literacy ranges from almost 91% in the Central area of the country to 80% in the Southeast.

WRITING In essence, it was reported that youths can write simple business and social letters, are fairly adept at fanciful, creative writing and are willing to try--but generally fail--to improve their writing through revision.

Youths at ages 9, 13 and 17 have trouble organizing their writing, transitions are not clear and, although tackled readily, revision is usually mechanical (punctuation and spelling) or "cosmetic," seldom improving the overall writing effort.

As a whole, 17-year-olds get poor marks in practical writing tasks. Example: On a job application letter, 64% forgot to include any means for a prospective employer to contact them.

Slightly more than half of the 13-year-olds know the format of an informal letter; about three-fourths can competently write a business letter. When writing about a personal point of view, 61% are successful; but only 31% can write adequately when the point of view must be defined and logical arguments developed to defend it.

Among 9-year-olds, the majority can write a simple, friendly note; but only 14% can successfully place an order by mail.

HISPANOS The first, major nationwide study of the education achievement of Hispanic (Spanish-heritage) students was released in midyear by National Assessment. Comprising more than five percent of the population, Hispanos are the second largest minority group in the nation. But

until the NAEP report, data on their education achievement have been scarce and quite general.

NAEP found that Hispanic students consistently are below their contemporaries in the rest of the nation in reading, science, mathemathetics, social studies and career development.

Moreover, many Hispanic students are in grades lower than generally appropriate for their age levels: By age 17, more than one-third of the Hispanic pupils are still in, or below, the 10th grade, compared with about one-tenth of white students. Only 54% of the Hispanic 17-year-olds are in the 11th grade, compared with 61% of the black and 76% of the white 17-year-old students.

According to the NAEP report, the greatest differences between Hispanic student achievement and student achievement nationwide appear at age 17, when Hispanos from the Northeast are almost 18 percentage points below the nation in social studies and 17 percentage points below in math. Only in math at ages 9 and 13 did Hispanic youths from the Northeast do better than Hispanic students from the West.

Drawing upon data from NAEP assessments made between 1971 and 1975, the report cautions that the Hispanic student population in NAEP surveys is large enough only in the West and the Northeast to give "firm" regional results. Also, the study continues, the students assessed represent only those Hispanic youths who speak English; no distinction is made as to whether or not English is the students' dominant or secondary language.

A SUPERINTENDENT SPEAKS

(The following letter was written to an official of a State Department of Education by the superintendent of a Southern school district. His letter was in response to a draft minimum competency program developed for discussion by a subcommittee of the State Board of Education. The person writing the letter is superintendent of a school district with an enrollment of 6500 students, 72% of whom are black. The superintendent is white.)

July 26, 1977

Dear _____:

I have reviewed the paper Proficiency and Review Program and find that I have several reservations. The following is offered in the spirit of what is best for children; and although I have taken liberty in using this response to inform others who have a vital interest in the children of this school district, I realize the working paper is offered in good faith and your office also is interested in what is best for children. Please accept these criticisms in the spirit in which they are offered.

My first reservation deals with what has become a national effort to make the diploma a screening instrument for employers. In spite of some folks' notion of what used to be, the diploma, in fact, has never been a credential. It has always been an award. All of us who taught in the port war era remember that there were always children who could not read or who read poorly in our classes and who graduated with diplomas. The certifying credential for students has been the transcript which displayed standardized test scores, grades, attendance, and attitudinal information. Grade point averages and rank in class were additional information provided for the interested college or employer. In fact, the high school credential, the transcript, has always been more exhaustive than its college counterpart. What underlies the present competency based diploma outcry is an underlying truth that says we will trade an exhaustive instrument, the transcript, for a bipolar, yes-or-no credential, the diploma. The logic that leads one to advocate the latter must have some other motive than fair and accurate reporting of the facts of twelve years of schooling. My own opinion is that the transcript ought to remain the certifying credential; however, as Trump has suggested, it ought to be extended to include other data not now available to colleges and employers, such as: non-academic interests and skills,

skills and experiences acquired outside of school, hobbies and activities that reflect aptitudes, etc.

My second concern in reviewing the proposed proficiency and review program is that the program will not meet Office for Civil Rights (OCR) requirements on grouping. Without arguing the merits of OCR requirements, let me state the effects your program will probably have. Once-a-year testing will hold students in sets of skill activity for an entire year at the high school level and up to three years at other levels. OCR guidelines demand frequent testing so that students are not isolated in tracks. The program as written will recreate the "dumbbell" English and math classes that every generation of educators has fought so hard to overcome. Since school achievement and incomes are closely correlated (Jencks, Educational Inequality), the special program students will most likely be low income black and white students. In many of our communities the isolation will not only be economic, but also racial. In fact, it should be predictable that your program will deny diplomas to a student group which, in many regions of our state, will be mostly poor and black with a large number of handicapped students for good measure.

Only professional naiveté would lead one to expect a one shot test, norm referenced or criterion referenced, to be read back on an individual student with any success. The attached article reported in a State Department of Education (SDE) newsletter accurately assesses the state of the art or science of testing, as I am sure you are aware. Yet, in the face of the facts of the inability of tests to be used on a single child, the SDE is proposing a program where one time testing will determine the fate of children for several three year periods, several one year periods, and finally for lifetime.

It is ironic that a state department of education that has led the nation in integrating its schools, in bringing the dropouts back into school, and in developing sound programs like Project Succeed, Individually Guided Education, kindergarten for each child and vocational education should at this late hour advocate a program that will, in all probability, re-isolate students economically and racially, push the dropout back out (who needs or wants an attendance certificate), and place an additional stigma on the handicapped. It seems that a better stance would be to argue in favor of what we have done. The State Department's own statistics show that the adult illiteracy rate is decreasing dramatically over an era when the schools were most beset with social change. Communities are now beginning to accept the integrated school and to lend support for improving its quality. Now is the time to refine the programs we have

started and for which there is considerable hope of success. We ought to be adding quality to the equality of access that we have worked so hard to establish. In this context the competency based diploma is a "cop-out."

I do not think much of the argument so often expressed at the superintendents' conference: The State Department of Education (the educators) must do something before the legislature does. The argument is no argument; it begs the question. We should rather assume that the lawmakers will fulfill their rightful function and consider the issue in light of what is best for their constituents, a considerable number of whom are poor, handicapped and of minority races. A legislative task force will doubtless measure the rights of those who are likely to be discriminated against, the rights of employers and colleges, and the expert opinions offered by testifying educators. The task force idea seems better than any preemption by the unilateral action of the State Department of Education.

In conclusion, and lest my position be misunderstood, I believe in specifying and teaching for competency. At every level, the skills, abilities and experience to be acquired ought to be specified, taught and tested. Recycling ought to occur daily, weekly, monthly or whenever deficiencies are noted. Progress ought to be noted and reported for each child. If such a refined curriculum is followed, most children will acquire the competencies they need. Finally, the transcript should report clearly to all concerned the competency levels achieved. In a logical extension of research findings, the curriculum should specify competencies, teachers should teach and reteach for those competencies, frequent tests should certify competencies, and transcripts should document competencies.

Mechanically the SDE ought to hold well publicized hearings, conduct a needs assessment, present research findings, and report on the programs now existing in other states before adopting a program with such far reaching implications.

I hope this letter is accepted in the spirit of what is best for young people. If I have appeared caustic, it is because of the danger I perceive in the issue and not because of my lack of faith in the SDE and its fine staff.

THE FIRST RESULTS FROM FLORIDA'S
MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAM

-- Report on Education of
the Disadvantaged, December 30, 1977

Approximately 36 percent of Florida's eleventh graders, who took the state's new functional literacy test for the first time this fall, failed the math section of the test, stunned state assessment officials admitted last week.

"We're surprised," said Ken Lowe, Director of Test Development for the state. "Everyone's surprised. The results show a severe need, especially in the area of math. We felt we would identify some students, but we didn't think it would be so large a number."

Florida's Fundamental Literacy Test is a 117-question measure of a high school graduate's minimal or "survival" skills, including ability to determine a monthly electric bill, calculate sales tax on different items, and compute interest on a savings account. The 120,000 eleventh graders who took the test in October have to pass it with a score of 70 to qualify for a high school diploma.

According to Lowe, the 36 percent of students who failed the math section and the ten to eleven percent who didn't pass in reading and writing must participate in remedial programs designed by local school districts. The students then have two more chances in the 1978-79 school year to pass the tests. If they fail to do so, they will graduate from high school with a certificate of attendance, not a diploma.

Lowe said Florida is the first state to actually administer a test students must pass to earn a diploma. He said Florida's state legislature appropriated $10 million for the 1977-78 school year which is currently being allocated to local school districts that file approved local student remediation plans. Noting that the legislature "has gone on record" as pledging $26.5 million for the 1978-79 school year, Lowe added that the amount of remedial assistance each district gets this year is based on the number of children fell in the lowest quartile in previously administered standardized tests.

THE POLITICS OF MINIMALCY

-- Mr. George Bonham, Editor
Change Magazine, November 1977

Change is a widely read magazine featuring articles which report on and discuss issues in higher education.

For states to impose reasonably solid standards of passage for high school seniors is in effect to deny high school certificates to an enormous number of young people, many of whom are likely to be minority students. In 20 out of the nation's 30 largest cities, one needs no reminding, a majority of public school enrollments are now minority children. To deny them the basic entry card for an already competitive job market is political dynamite. The real issue here is not only the drive for minimal academic standards, but making available an equal shake at life's opportunities. This dilemma is hardly going to be advertised nationally, but it is illusory to expect school officials to press for the sort of academic standards that the back-to-basics people now seem to demand.

A sampling of New York State's new competency tests, which by 1979 must be passed by every high school senior as a prerequisite to graduation, is illustrative of the "standards" that are going to be required: "Fred has four candy bars. If he divides each bar in half, what is the total number of pieces he will have? 8...2...16...4?" The reading test reproduces a church notice of services scheduled for various faiths. The multiple choice question asks the time of the Methodist service. Elsewhere a restaurant menu appears, and students are asked to read out costs of various items. A multiple-choice mathematics question asks: "When written as a percent, the fraction ¼ is...75%...50%...25%...20%?" No doubt some advocates of competency would be appalled by all of this. But in more cynical moments, one can reply that, after all, this satisfies the public's hunger. If placating the public is all we care about, the act of imposing standards may be enough.

What is at stake here is a sensible and balanced approach to a public issue that may already have gotten out of hand. National underachievement exists. But it will hardly be cured by this new national paranoia. A mindless pursuit of the basics may leave us with an equally pernicious neglect of such "nonbasics" as foreign langauges, the social and natural sciences, and yes, the humanities. History shows that one can easily be a literate rascal or an evil mathematical genius. What is most needed now is a return to basic sanity.

GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING PERFORMANCE-BASED EDUCATION MANDATES

(This is a draft document prepared by the staff of a national teachers organization. Because it does not reflect the official position of the organization the name of the group is not cited here for attribution.)

Increasingly, state education programs include mandates for "Performance Based Education,"/"Competency Based Curriculum"/"Minimal Competency Measurement" and other such titles. Typically such mandates provide for the measurement of "competencies" and the setting of "standards" that individual students must master for high school graduation and/or grade-to-grade promotion.

Most often a standardized test is administered to measure simple proficiencies in reading and mathematics. In some instances a skill is measured as applied to practical "survival" tasks. The results of these state testing programs are used to determine student status, to set educational policy, to measure effectiveness of schools, and, in many states, to allocate financial resources.

Statewide student testing/accountability programs limit opportunities for students to learn and teachers to make instructional decisions. States should develop policy that encourages local schools to develop their own criteria and standards for planning and implementing student assessment programs.

In the interest of assuring quality education for all students, this organization strongly suggests that citizens apply the following criteria in assessing state educational policies related to competency based education.

1. State policy should encourage schools to employ a broad range of criteria for assessing student performances, and provide that in no case will written tests be used as the sole criterion for either movement from grade to grade or graduation from secondary schools.

2. State policy should provide that the proficiencies to be evaluated reflect all the goals of schooling adopted by the state or the local school district and not be limited to narrow skills. Basic skills should be defined locally and be consistent with local goals and objectives.

3. State policy should encourage local districts to develop and use a profile of data on each student using such techniques as:

   a. professional judgment of teachers and other specialists
   b. sample products of the student's work
   c. interviews of students
   d. student self-evaluation
   e. the completion of student contracts
   f. work-study evaluation

4. When written exercises (tests, essays, or other written evidence) are used, state policy should be guided by the following criteria:

   a. items are developed locally based on local objectives;
   b. exercises are diagnostic in nature so that areas of deficiency can be readily recognized and, wherever possible, the nature of required remediation identified;
   c. exercises in the various subject areas are developed and agreed on by teachers who teach in those subjects;
   d. objectives for instruction are clear to all concerned--teachers, students, parents, administrators, the public in general;
   e. test items/exercises are criterion-referenced, not norm-referenced;
   f. students have multiple opportunities over a period of years to be assessed in a variety of ways by classroom teachers and other professionals and to correct the deficiencies identified as a result of assessment;
   g. students who are found to be deficient must be apprised of the deficiencies and the school system must provide teachers with the materials, time and specialist help to assist students;
   h. margin of error in the exercises must be taken into account in determining minimal requirements.

5. State policy should deemphasize grade-level designations and grade-level promotions because growth is not precise or uniform. A "year's growth in a year," or a "month's growth in a month" is an artificial designation.

Additionally, the states should make provision for technical assistance to local school staffs for developing skills in assessing student needs, setting goals, developing programs, and evaluating progress.

STANDARDS ARE NOT ENOUGH

-- Dr. Mary F. Berry
Assistant Secretary for Education
U.S. Department of Health,
Education, and Welfare

Even if a decision is reached about areas of required competence, the problem remains of deciding just how well a person must perform to be judged minimally competent. Policy-makers may wish to peg minimum competencies relatively high (to encourage improvement and competition among schools) or relatively low (to insure every student a realistic chance of success). They may also need to adjust acceptable competency levels over time as social contexts and the population's average skill level change.

The most difficult problem may be that of providing educational programs that will improve student performance to meet new competency standards. Even though there are proven methods for improving the performance of individuals on various measures of educational achievements, it is typically difficult to implement much of this knowledge in the schools, because of costs, constraints, staff capacities, and the resistance of both parents and teachers to some potential avenues of improvement. Additionally, these paths about improved performance, found in research projects or in exemplary sites, are neither widely known nor easy to replicate, and this is especially the case in the upper secondary grades. What will become of schools or students who do not attain minimum standards? Minimum standards must be accompanied by resources to help students and educators measure up to them; otherwise they become barriers that will reinforce existing inequities in the rewards of schooling.

- September 15, 1977

If the time-honored motivators of standards and diplomas worked with all children, we would have few educational problems. They may work well with some children from financially successful families who place a high value on education, but there are indications from various industrialized countries that these motivators are not sufficient for many children and that, if we want higher achievement among such children, we must rely on researchers and innovative practitioners to find new means. Standards are particularly insufficient when the school is in some sense foreign to children as when the home language differs from that spoken in school.

- July 14, 1977

COMPETENCY PROGRAMS CAN IDENTIFY STUDENTS WHO NEED REMEDIATION

-- Dr. John Fremer
Director of Test Development
Elementary and Secondary School Programs
Educational Testing Service

It seems clear to me that in many places the high school serves merely as a preparatory school for college. An elitist attitude toward what the high schools "should" teach leads some teachers and administrators to neglect the important task of bringing each student to the level of literacy where they can cope with the demands of adult life.

When an elitist attitude permeates a high school program, students in need of remedial help are often forced to adapt their learning style to inflexible instructional approaches. In such a situation remedial programs are not appropriately planned, nor do they take into account enormous individual differences, nor do they make provision for monitoring and reviewing student progress.

I would suggest that the best remedial programs are those that carefully analyze the reasons for students' problems, try a variety of approaches, use the method appropriate to the student and the skill in question, and attempt to bring the student as far as possible in the whole range of basic skills.

With its emphasis on standards and requirements, the minimal competency testing movement should be considered a success if its sole accomplishment were to bring to light the number of students needing remedial attention. If, in addition, this testing movement creates a mechanism that provides an early warning of students needing help, the movement will have made a signal contribution to secondary education in the United States.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE COMPETENCY BASED EDUCATION (CBE) MOVEMENT

-- Dr. Gordon Cawelti
Executive Director
Association for Supervision
and Curriculum Development

November 1977

It seems to me that there are two potential benefits that can be derived from establishing competencies as a basis for promotion or graduation. (It should be noted that in at least two states the CBE movement has been extended into the elementary grades, and it is likely that more will attempt this.)

One of these benefits is that it does appear to be useful to focus the resources of a school district on a clear set of goals. That is to say, behavioral objectives in and of themselves are of limited value in attempting to overcome the learning deficiency of a youngster. Similarly, a physician will do no better at treating a cancer that he does not know how to treat successfully, even if he articulates the condition in a highly objective language. But because of the high mobility rate, particularly in the urban setting, it is necessary to have as clear an understanding as possible among the several teachers in the system as to the precise skills that should be taught at the various levels. A recent $3.5 million study by the Educational Testing Service has indicated that among the five most successful programs they were able to locate in an empirical study, one of the conditions that was always present in the schools with the most successful programs was the fact that the faculty, administration, and board had clearly indicated basic skills as a high priority instructional goal, and they had allocated resources accordingly. Bloom and others have concluded that improving achievement levels among slow learners does much to improve their self concept.

A second potential benefit from the CBE movement is that it may afford us for the first time in many years an opportunity to fundamentally reexamine the nature of general education for secondary students. The present instructional program represents more what I called a "patchwork curriculum" among traditional separate subjects. While we have been through a curriculum reform era in the fifties, an innovation era in the sixties, and now find ourselves in an accountability era, at no time during these movements have I seen a substantial effort to define the nature of general education--that education which is "basic" and that all youngsters should receive.

I have proposed that this general education should come among these five areas or clusters as I have described them: (a) learning skills; (b) health, physical education, and leisure; (c) career education; (d) cultural studies; and (e) societal studies. I believe that if we were willing to look seriously at the competencies that are required for a successful adult to function and be fulfilled in an advanced technological society, it would be worth the effort to get seriously into the CBE movement.

I think we must remember that education should be a liberating experience for all--helping them to achieve their fullest potential and to relate in a humane way to all persons with whom they have contact. This clearly will not be a product of the CBE movement as it is now mandated in so many states. To attempt to predict fully what all young people ought to be by the time they leave school is futile. I can get little enthusiasm for the narrowly defined description of what constitutes general education for secondary school age youngsters as I have examined the curriculum provisions of the CBE movement at the precollegiate level.

I hope that all persons who would be instructional leaders will argue as persuasively as possible for the development of a balanced program of general education that envisions education as liberating and not restricting. Any attempt to return to an elitist form of education that cuts off low income, culturally disadvantaged ot alienated youths from the mainstream is counter to our democratic ideals. I do feel that alternative settings for such cohorts may be the only immediate answer to provide appropriate instruction, but this is better than to simply give them a certificate of attendance and cast them into the streets. Young people most assuredly are headed for welfare and failure in adult life if we dare to oversimplify such an important question.

THE LIMITS OF TESTS

-- Secretary Joseph A. Califano, Jr.
United States Department of
Health, Education and Welfare

October 24, 1977

Testing for basic competency can serve important purposes in our educational system. But basic competency testing will be acceptable and effective only if we stress, along with its benefits, the critical limitations and dangers of testing.

First, like other methods of assessing educational achievement, tests are far from perfect. The beguiling precision of test scores disguises many difficult questions about what tests measure and how well they succeed. Tests are tools--not magic wands. Even with the most sophisticated tests, the assessment of learning will still require sensitive judgments about a child's human development; tests can help inform such judgments; tests cannot make them.

Second, there is the issue of cultural bias. Tests can prove especially difficult for particular groups of children. A question about the stock market relates more closely to the life experiences of one cultural group than another. Clearly students whose native tongue is not English will find standardized tests more difficult. School children from poor or broken families may have faced obstacles making success in school more difficult to attain.

But these are reasons for improving tests--not discarding them. We must continue our efforts to develop tests whose content does not place an excessive premium on cultural background. Even these will prove harder to children from deprived backgrounds or with less facility in English, but this does not make the tests unfair.

For there are some subjects--I would include the three R's among them--that every child must know to share fully in the opportunities of American life. A low test score does not mean a student is inferior or uneducable; it means only that to date his progress in the subjects tested shows considerable room for improvement. We must identify children who lack these basic skills, so that we can help them. Not to do so would be the ultimate injustice.

The third basic limitation on the use of tests is that they measure progress toward but a few of the myriad

goals we ask our schools to pursue. Not all skills are basic skills; in focusing on minimal competency, we cannot let the minimum become the maximum. We must ensure that students of ability are given the chance to develop to the fullest, and that important subjects beyond the three R's are not overlooked.

Academic achievement is but one objective of our schools. Few of us would be happy to see high school graduates who had mastered English literature and trigonometry--but who lacked maturity, self-discipline, honesty and judgment. Standardized tests can help us measure whether students are learning certain skills; they cannot tell us how well schools are performing other large and important parts of their jobs.

This last limitation is a clear warning which all of us must sound to the public against preoccupation with testing. The purpose of schools is not merely to produce high scores on achievement tests; it is to educate children, to help teach them to appreciate what is worthwhile, to give them the ability to extract meaning from future experiences.

To teach the tests: to focus obsessively on test scores, would be stultifying--and unlikely in the end, to improve student achievement. Our great and urgent need goes far beyond tests and testing programs--it is to improve dramatically the whole process of education. If we do that, test scores will reflect that improvement.

In short, basic competency tests, used skillfully, and sensitively, are useful and necessary--they are a limited, but very important tool for charting and improving the process of education. We need to do more testing and we need to do better testing.

RESOURCES

Below are listed just a few of the many materials which are available on the subject of minimum competency programs. The information and points of view represent a variety of perspectives and degrees of objectivity. However, for citizens who want more information on the subject of minimum competency programs for students, we recommend these publications. If there is no charge indicated for the material it means we are not aware that there is a cost.

1. Update VII: Minimal Competency Testing

   - by Chris Pipho
     December, 1977
     Cost: $6.50

   Order from: Research and Information Department
   Education Commission of the States
   1860 Lincoln Street
   Denver, Colorado 80295

   This is an invaluable document to those who want to understand how various states are initiating minimum competency programs. It provides a state-by-state review of legislation, state board of education rulings, and state department of education activity which relate to competency programs for students. It also reports on the status of federal legislation and local school district programs.

2. "Remarks of HEW Secretary Joseph A. Califano, Jr., before the Annual Meeting of the College Entrance Examination Board."

   Order from: Office of Public Affairs
   U.S. Department of Health,
   Education, and Welfare
   330 Independence Avenue, S.W.
   Washington, D.C. 20201

   Secretary Califano's 19-page speech on "Excellence and Equity in the Search for Standards" was delivered on October 24, 1977. It not only sets forth Califano's views on the subject of basic skills and competency programs for students, but indicates how the Federal government intends to respond to the concerns raised by the competency movement.

3. Educational Leadership: Competencies as the Aim of Education.

Order from: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Suite 1100
1701 K Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006
Cost: $2.00

Educational Leadership is the journal of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, a professional organization composed of school administrators and curriculum specialists. This November, 1977, issue of the journal is devoted almost exclusively to the subject of minimum competency programs. Of particular interest may be articles which report on statewide competency programs in Oregon and Maryland. The articles related to competency account for about 70 pages in the journal.

4. Minimum Student Performance Standards for Florida Schools, 1977-1980

Three separate booklets: Grades 3 and 5: Reading, Writing and Mathematics
1977, 24 pages

Grades 8 and 11: Reading, Writing and Mathematics
1977, 30 pages

Exceptional Students: Programs for Hearing Impaired and Educable Mentally Retarded Students
1977, 80 pages

Order from: Performance Standards Section
Florida Department of Education
Tallahassee, Florida 32304

The standards and specific basic skills in these booklets were developed subsequent to the passage of Florida's Educational Accountability Act in 1976. They are used as a basis for the Florida Statewide Assessment Program which is now in the first year of implementation.

5. Elementary-Secondary Guide for Oregon Schools: Part I (no charge)

Elementary-Secondary Guide for Oregon Schools: Part II ($2.00)

Graduation Requirements Guidelines, Revised ($2.00)

Order from: Documents Clerk
Oregon Department of Education
942 Lancaster Drive, N.E.
Salem, Oregon 97310

Oregon has been working on implementing a minimum competency program for the past five years. Because the Oregon program allows local districts a great deal of latitude in developing their competency standards, these documents are guidelines to assist the local districts. Oregon officials are candid in acknowledging that they have made mistakes in implementing the competency program, and these guides reflect efforts to improve the program. These materials may serve as useful resources and models to other states and local districts initiating minimum competency programs.

6. "Competency Testing: Potential for Discrimination"

- by merle Steven McClung
The Clearinghouse Review
September, 1977
pp. 439-448
Cost: $1.00

"Competency Testing Legislation: Shifting the Burden to Students?"

- by Merle Steven McClung
Education Law Bulletin/Legislative Reports
September, 1977 four pages

Both of the above publications may be ordered from:

Center for Law and Education
6 Appian Way
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

"Competency Testing and Handicapped Students"

- by Merle Steven McClung and Diane Pullin
Center for Law and Education
(to be published in March, 1978)

The above publications raise questions about the effects of some minimum competency programs. The documents may be helpful to citizens and policy makers who want to be aware of and address some of these possibly harmful effects.

7. "Seven Key Notes on Minimal Competency Testing"

   - by Henry M. Bricknell
     October, 1977
     12 pages
     (attached--see section on "What Citizens Should look for...")

"A Critique of 'Minimal Competency Testing'"

   - by Arthur E. Wise
     September, 1977
     39 pages

"The Politics of Proficiency"

   - by E. W. Kelley
     October, 1977
     49 pages

"The Legal Implications of Statewide Pupil Performance Standards"

   - by Paul L. Tractenberg
     41 pages

"The Costs of Legislated Minimal Competency Requirements"

   - by Barry D. Anderson
     September, 1977
     32 pages

"Minimal Educational Standards: A Systemic Perspective"

   - by Thomas F. Green
     35 pages

   Order from: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
   Education Commission of the States
   1860 Lincoln Street
   Denver, Colorado 80295
   (no charge)

These documents were distributed as part of the materials made available at a series of regional

workshops in September/October, 1977, on the subject of minimal competency testing. The workshops were sponsored by the National Institute of Education and the Education Commission of the States, and were designed for educators, legislators, and other interested citizens and policy makers. Most of the papers' titles are self-explanatory. The paper by Henry Bricknell is an essential document which clearly outlines the fundamental questions and dilemmas which must be carefully considered in developing a minimum competency program.

8. Proficiency Testing: Implications for Higher Education

   - by John R. Hills
     1977
     30 pages
     Cost: $2.00

   Order from: Southern Regional Education Board
   130 Sixth Street, N.W.
   Atlanta, Georgia 30313

   This booklet examines the interface between the growing number of competency programs for pre-college students, and the curricula and programs of higher education institutions.

9. The NAEP Newsletter

   Order from: National Assessment of Educational Progress
   Suite 700, 1860 Lincoln Street
   Denver, Colorado 80295
   Cost: No charge for single copies, 10¢ each for multiple copies

   The National Assessment of Educational Progress is a project of the Education Commission of the States. The NAEP gathers information and conducts a national testing program to determine the degree to which educational goals are being met. It makes this information available to the public so problem areas can be identified, priorities established, and progress over a period of time determined. Back copies of the NAEP Newsletter, with more details on its findings, may be ordered from NAEP offices. NAEP also has a free publications list describing other reports, data, and leaflets that may be ordered.

APPENDIX

The following 6-page chart lists activity in Minimal Competency Testing for the following states:

Arizona
California
Colorado
Delaware
Florida
Georgia
Idaho
Kentucky
Louisiana
Maine
Maryland
Michigan
Missouri
Nebraska
New Hampshire
New Jersey
New Mexico
New York
North Carolina
Oregon
Oklahoma
Rhode Island
Vermont
Virginia
Washington

Fall, 1977

STATE ACTIVITY

MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING

Prepared by:
Chris Pipho, Associate Director
Department of Research and Information
Education Commission of the States
Denver, Colorado

STATE	ACTION TAKEN	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TEST	COMMENTS
Arizona	State Dept. of Education Ruling	Set by the State Dept. of Education Assessment by Local District - No statewide test prescribed	8th Grade 12th Grade	Reading Writing Computation	For graduation from 8th and 12th grades	Effective January 1, 1976, students must be able to read, write and compute at the 6th grade level to receive the standard 8th grade certificate and at the 9th grade level for high school graduation.
California	(early exit test) SB 1112-1972 SB 1243-1975 SB 1502-1976	Test and cut-off standards set by the California Dept. of Education	Age 16 to adult	Process areas of reading and computation content areas: consumer economics and mathematics	Award high school diploma and leave school with parent permission	Title of program: California High School Proficiency Test Test administration and security handled under contract with private testing corporation.
California	AB 3408-Ch.856 1976	State Board to supply performance indicators and examples of minimum standards Local school districts to set graduation standards	Test once between 7-9 and twice between grades 10-11	Reading Writing Computation	For high school graduation	The act also prescribes course of study requirements. In effect for the graudation class of 1980.
Colorado	SB 180-1975 C.R.S. 22-32-109.5	Local Boards	9-12 - test twice a year	Local District Option	Local District Option for high school graduation	If a local board of education imposes a proficiency test for high school graduation, it must follow the stipulations of this act.
Delaware	State Board of Education Resolution 1976	State Dept. of Education After baseline test is given	Baseline Instrument grade 11 1978	Level II Competencies i.e.: the application reading writing, and mathematics	For high school graduation	The development of the baseline testing instrument has been awarded to a private test contractor

Fall, 1977

STATE ACTIVITY

MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING

Prepared by:
Chris Pipho, Associate Director
Department of Research and Information
Education Commission of the States
Denver, Colorado

STATE	ACTION TAKEN	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TEST	COMMENTS
Florida	CSSB 340-1975 F.S. 229.814 CSSB 107-1976 F.S. Ch.76.226	State and local boards	Grades 3, 5, 8 and 11	Basic skill areas Functional literacy	For high school graduation - Grade promotion and early exit from high school	Titled: The Educational Accountability Act. Places ban on social promotion
Georgia	State Board of Education Action	State Board and State Department	Grades 4, 8, and 11	Grades 4 and 8 Reading, math social studies and science. H.S. Test under development	The state board of education has not taken final action on the use of the tests	The student assessment program is part of a long-range plan to fund local school districts through a program of comprehensive planning.
Idaho	State Board of Education Resolution	State Board of Education	Grades 9-12	Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, and Spelling	For high school graduation at the option of local districts	Students passing the proficiency program will receive a diploma with the state board seal. In districts not participating, students will receive district diploma.
Kentucky	1977 State Board of Education adopted 4-year competency plan	State Department with Task Force Assistance	Grades 3, 5, 8 and 11	Criterion referenced test in reading, writing, arithmetic	For high school graduation and grade promotion	
Louisiana	HB 810, Act 709 1976	State	Grades 4, 8, and 11	Basic communication and computational skill areas with criterion reference test	No mention of graduation or grade promotion	Requirements part of the accountability and assessment law.
Maine	Enacted amended LD 1810 Ch.78 of the Private Special Laws	State Department of Education	Grade 11	(See Comments)	For high school graduation	The law specifics that the Commissioner of Education is to be assisted in the development of the assessment instrument and the areas to be tested by a statewide committee. The law names the organizations to be represented

Fall, 1977

STATE ACTIVITY

MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING

Prepared by:
Chris Pipho, Associate Director
Department of Research and Information
Education Commission of the States
Denver, Colorado

STATE	ACTION TAKEN	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TEST	COMMENTS
Maryland	HB 1433,M.A.C., Art.77, Sec. 980 1976 and HB 1462, Ch.559 1977	State Board of Education	Grades 2-12 Grades 3,7,9 and 11	Reading	For grade promotion and high school graduation	Students not meeting minimum requirements may be retained in some grade or enrolled in remedial program
Michigan	State Department of Education	State Department of Education	Grades 4, 7, 10	Reading and Math	For local district use	12th grade minimal competency test, covering life role skills under study
Missouri	State Board of Education	State Department of Education	Grade 8	The application of reading, mathematics, and government/economics skills	No mandate for graduation or grade promotion	The Basic Education Skills test, developed by the Department of Education, has been field tested in grades 8, 10 and 12.
Nebraska	State Department of Education	Local School Districts	Begins in Grade 5 and continues until mastery is achieved by each student in each skill area	Reading, writing and mathematics	State developed test is not to be used for grade retention or promotion	Local school districts may use the Nebraska Assessment Battery of Essential Learning Skills (N-ABELS) or develop their own test.
Nevada	AB 400-1977	State Board of Education	Grades 6, 9, and 12	Reading, writing and mathematics	For high school graduation	Students may be promoted to the next grade if examination is failed but remedial work is to be provided.
New Hampshire	State Department of Education	State Department of Education	Grade 4 Grade 8 & 12 under development	Communications and mathematics	Grade promotion and high school graduation not mentioned	Program is to serve as guidelines for local school districts

Fall, 1977

STATE ACTIVITY

MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING

Prepared by:
Chris Pipho, Associate Director
Department of Research and Information
Education Commission of the States
Denver, Colorado

STATE	ACTION TAKEN	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TEST	COMMENTS
New Jersey	A.1736,Ch.97 1976	State		Reading and math	Student diagnosis and remedial identification	Local districts are to provide remedial assistance in order for students to meet state standards
	State Department of Education	State Department of Education	3,6, 9 and 11	Reading and math Life skills under study	Identification of students needing instructional assistance	Development of testing instrument is under contract to a private test development agency
New Mexico	State Board of Education	State	Elementary level grade choice up to local district and grade 10	Elementary: local option Secondary: proficiency battery based on adult performance level (APL) and a writing sample	Proficiency endorsement on high school diploma if test is passed	The state department of education is working on a series of basic skill area curriculum guides
New York	State Board of Regents	State Board of Regents	Grades 9-12	Reading and mathematics with a criterion referenced test; also, civics and citizenship practical science, health and drug education and writing and language skills	For high school graduation	The New York Department of Education also administers the Regents Diploma Program and the Pupil Evaluation Plan (PEP) both related to measuring student performance in the basic skill areas

Fall, 1977

STATE ACTIVITY

MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING

Prepared by:
Chris Pipho, Associate Director
Department of Research and Information
Education Commission of the States
Denver, Colorado

STATE	ACTION TAKEN	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TEST	COMMENTS
North Carolina	Enacted HB 204	By Competency Test Commission created by law	Grade 11 beginning in 1978-79	To be determined by the Competency Test Commission - See Comments	For high school graduation	The test is to measure "those skills and that knowledge thought necessary to enable an individual to function independently and successfully in assuming the responsibilities of citizenship."
	Enacted HB 205	By Competency Test Commission (separate from HB 204)	Grades 1 & 2 criterion referenced test Grades 3, 6, & 9 "Norm" referenced test	To be determined by the Competency Test Commission	To be determined by the Competency Test Commission	
Oregon	State Board of Education	Local Districts	District Option	Reading, writing and computation. Local option for personal development, social responsibility and career development.	For high school graduation	Graduation requirements are based on course credit, attendance and required competencies in personal, social and career areas.
Oklahoma	State Board of Education	Decision will follow baseline data test	Grades 3, 6, 9 --- Grade 12	Reading --- Survival skills	Decision will follow baseline data test.	The baseline test instrument will be given to 15,000 students in the fall of 1977
Rhode Island	State Department of Education		Grades 4, 8 and age 17 used in pilot test	Comprehension Analysis and Evaluation known as the "life skills"	For local district and state department use. Competency base high school diploma under study	The Rhode Island master plan for evaluation and the statewide assessment program have jointly contributed to the pilot testing in the life skills area

Fall, 1977

STATE ACTIVITY

MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING

Prepared by:
Chris Pipho, Associate Director
Department of Research and Information
Education Commission of the States
Denver, Colorado

STATE	ACTION TAKEN	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TEST	COMMENTS
Vermont	State Board of Education	State Board of Education	Continuous	Reading, writing, speaking, listening, and mathematics. Area of reasoning is under study.	For high school graduation	Mastery of the basic competencies is to be one requirement for graduation unless student has a limiting handicap.
Virginia	HB 256-1976	State Board of Education in cooperation with local districts	All grades yearly with first emphasis in grades 1-3 and 4-6	Reading, communications and mathematics	To measure progress of individual students	Act known as The Standard of Quality Act.
Washington	SB 3026 HB 1345-1976	Local districts	4th & 8th	Standardized achievement test in reading, mathematics and language arts	For school district and parent use	School districts are encouraged to develop a separate test for second grade for the early identification of pupils needing assistance in language and computational skills